

SHIP BUILDING

Tours to revisit town's shipbuilding heyday

By TOM BENSON
The Patriot Ledger

DUXBURY — People will have a chance this weekend to revisit what once was one of the preeminent shipbuilding centers in New England.

On Saturday and Sunday, the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society will conduct tours of historic sites that remain from the early 19th century, when Duxbury was a leader in shipbuilding.

Patrick Browne, director of the society, said even people who think they know their town's history may learn a thing or two.

"The age of Duxbury (will surprise people)," he said. "Everybody who lives in town knows it goes back to the Pilgrims, but people don't know the English were living here almost as soon as the Pilgrims came over."

After landing in Plymouth in 1620, settlers soon established summer homes in what was to become Duxbury.

By the end of the century, a number of mills had been built along the rivers.

Shipbuilding assumed more and more economic importance, reaching its peak in the first half of the 19th century.

"That was the golden era of the town," Browne said. "It was very prominent. Some of the shipbuilding families here had some of the largest fleets in the area."

As transportation changed just before the Civil War, Duxbury had a tough time maintaining its preeminence.

"By the mid-19th century, they were building bigger ships that you just can't build in Duxbury," Browne said. "The harbor's too small. After 1850, the town stayed quiet until Route 3, when it became more of a suburb."

Browne guessed that most of the residents now work in Boston.

The tours will offer a brief look at

DUXBURY

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historical society

the landmarks from the shipbuilding era.

The bus tours, which are expected to last about an hour, will begin at Duxbury High School and wind through the old subvillage of Tinkertown and around Standish Shore before heading onto Washington Street, where grand homes from the shipbuilding era still stand.

Many of those homes originally were boarding houses for shipyard workers.

Riders also will be able to take in the Myles Standish monument and homesite, as well as a host of other historic places, Browne said. The tours will be led by historical society members.

A similar tour was offered last year, and the historical society hopes to make it an annual event.

The tours will leave at 10 a.m. Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday. Reservations are required. Tickets for adults cost \$7; for seniors, \$5; for children, \$3; and for a family of four or more, \$15.

The money raised will help fund the society's educational programs, including lectures and tours for students in grades 2, 5 and 10.

For information or reservations, call (781) 934-6106. The tours are open to residents of other towns.